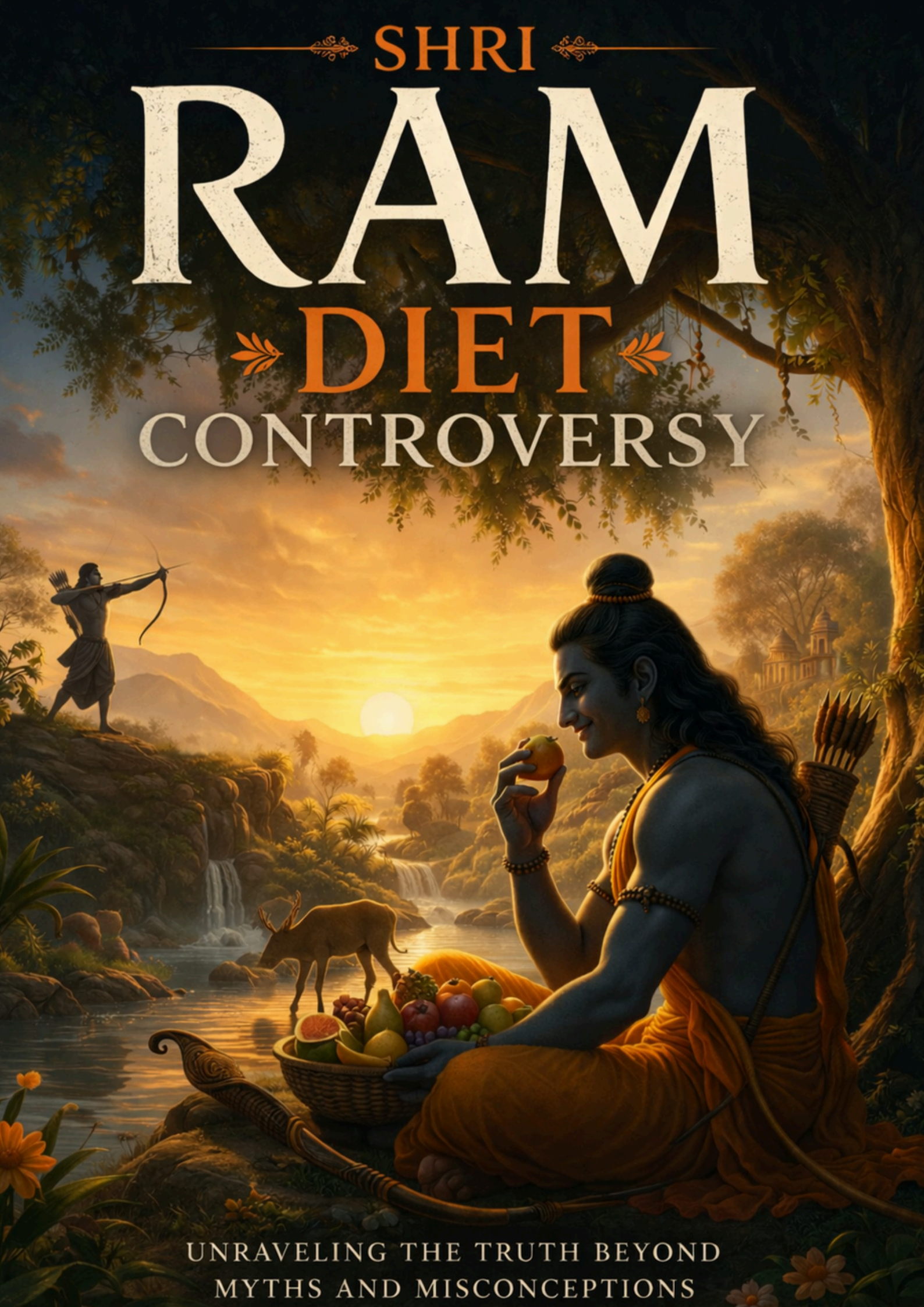

SHRI
RAM
DIET
CONTROVERSY
UNRAVELING THE TRUTH BEYOND
MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This page examines the claim that Shree Ram consumed meat, analyzing commonly cited verses from the Valmiki Ramayana and other texts. It highlights how mistranslations of words like “māṃsa” and lack of context have led to confusion. By looking at original Sanskrit meanings and the values associated with Ram as Maryada Purushottam, this section challenges popular misconceptions and encourages a more accurate, context-based understanding of the scriptures.

FIRST LETS SEE THE CONTORVERSILA VERSES AND
SEE THEIR TRANSLATION

VALMIKI RAMAYANA AYODHYAKANDA CHAPTER 52 VERSE 89

सुराघटसहस्त्रेण मांसभूतौदनेन च।
यक्ष्ये त्वां प्रीयतां देवि पुरीं पुनरुपागता॥ ८९॥

"Having returned to Ayodhyā, I shall worship you with thousand and one articles not available even to gods as well as with lands free from revenue, raiment and cooked rice*. Be pleased with me, O goddess!
(89)

VALMIKI RAMAYANA AYODHYAKANDA CHAPTER 52 VERSE 102

तौ तत्र हत्वा चतुरो महामृगान्
वराहमृश्यं पृषतं महारुरुम्।
आदाय मेध्यं त्वरितं बुभुक्षितौ
वासाय काले ययतुर्वनस्पतिम्॥ १०२॥

Having hunted for love of sport four large deer, viz., a Varāha, Ṛśya, Pṛṣata and Mahāruru (the four principal species of deer), and taking with them articles of food consisting of fruits etc. fit for being consigned as an oblation into the sacred fire, now that

they felt hungry (after sport), the two brothers quickly sought the foot of a tree where they had evidently stationed Sītā within their sight for the time they were engaged in sport, for taking rest after supper during the night.

(102)

LET US NOW EXAMINE THE FIRST ŚLOKA, WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE CONTROVERSIAL TERM “मांस” (MĀṂSA). IN ORDER TO DETERMINE WHETHER THIS WORD HAS BEEN TRANSLATED ACCURATELY, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO CONSULT AUTHORITATIVE SANSKRIT LEXICONS (ŚABDAKOŚA) AND ANALYZE ITS SEMANTIC RANGE WITHIN THE APPROPRIATE TEXTUAL CONTEXT.

FOR THIS I AM USING VAMAN SHIVRAM APTE SANSKRIT TO ENGLISH SABDOKOSH

मांसं Flesh, meat; समांसो मधुपर्कः U. 4. (The word is thus fancifully derived in Ms. 5. 55.:—मां स भक्षयिताऽमुत्र यस्य मांसमिहाद्म्यहम्। एतन्मांसस्य मांसत्वं प्रवदन्ति मनीषिणः ॥). 2 The flesh of fish. 2 The fleshy part of a fruit. -सः 1 A worm. 2 N. of a mixed tribe, selling meat. -Comp. -अद्, -अद, -आदिन्,

WE CAN CLEARLY SEE THE WORD “मांस” (māṃsa)ALSO MEANS FLESH OF FRUIT

In the second verse, reference is made to plant-based sustenance, and the term that denotes fruit is clearly identifiable. According to authoritative Sanskrit lexicons (śabdakośa), the word “वनस्पति” (vanaspati) refers specifically to a large tree that bears fruit.
This definition establishes that “वनस्पति” is not merely a general term for vegetation, but one that inherently includes fruit-bearing trees and their produce. Therefore, the translation must be understood accordingly, as the lexical evidence confirms that the verse is referring to fruit through the use of this term.

वनस्पतिः 1 a large forest tree, especially one that bears fruit apparently without any blossoms. 2 A tree in general; तमाशु विघ्नं तपसस्तपस्वी वनस्पतिं वज्र इवावभज्य Ku. 3. 74.

ONE MORE CONTROVERSIAL VERSE
VALMIKI RAMAYANA AYODHYAKANDA CHAPTER 55 VERSE 32

क्रोशमात्रं ततो गत्वा भ्रातरौ रामलक्ष्मणौ।
बहून् मेध्यान् मृगान् हत्वा चेरतुर्यमुनावने॥ ३२॥

Having walked only a couple of miles from that place and killing many a consecrated deer, the two brothers, Śrī Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, roamed about in the forest on the bank of the Yamunā. (32)

This verse is also frequently misinterpreted, as some translators render the meaning in terms of eating, whereas the original context clearly refers to movement or roaming. To clarify this, it is essential to examine the Sanskrit word “चर” (cara) through authoritative lexicons (śabdakośa).

चर् 1 P. (चरति, चरित) 1 To walk, move, go about, roam, wander; नष्टा शोका हरिणशिशवो मंदमंदं चरंति S. 1. 15 (चर may mean here 'to graze' also); इंद्रियाणां हि चरतां Bg. 2. 67; कपयश्चेरुरार्तस्य रामस्येव मनोरथाः R. 12. 59; Ms. 2. 23, 6. 68; 8. 235; 9. 306; 10. 55. 2 To practise, perform, observe; चरतः किल दुश्चरं तपः ib. 8 79; Y. 1. 60; Ms. 3. 30. 3 To act, behave towards, conduct oneself (oft. with loc of the person)

ONE MORE CONTROVERSIAL SHLOK

VALMIKI RAMAYANA AYODHYAKANDA CAHPTER 96 VERSE 1 AND 2

तां तदा दर्शयित्वा तु मैथिलीं गिरिनिम्नगाम्।
निषसाद गिरिप्रस्थे सीतां मांसेन छन्दयन्॥ १॥

Having shown on that occasion the hilly stream, Mandākinī, to the aforesaid Sītā, the princess of Mithilā, Śrī Rāma for his part sat down on a single flat rock humouring Sītā with a description of the pulp of fruits fit for the consumption of ascetics as follows : (1)

इदं मेध्यमिदं स्वादु निष्टप्तमिदमग्निना।
एवमास्ते स धर्मात्मा सीतया सह राघवः॥ २॥

"This fruit is fit for being offered as an oblation into the sacred fire, this is luscious and this bulb has been roasted well in fire." In this way the celebrated Śrī Rāma, a scion of Raghu, whose mind was devoted to righteousness, spent his time with Sītā. (2)

In this passage, the word "मांस" (māṃsa) appears once again, which, as previously established through Sanskrit lexicons (śabdakośa), denotes the pulp or fleshy portion of a substance. In this context, it is to be understood as referring to the edible pulp of fruit rather than animal flesh.

The verse further mentions the act of roasting, which is often used to support misinterpretations. However, this does not necessitate a reference to meat. In practical terms, several plant-based foods and fruits are commonly subjected to roasting or heating. Items such as tomatoes and eggplants, for instance, are frequently roasted to make them suitable for consumption. Additionally, cashews also require roasting; without roasting, eating raw cashews can be poisonous because their shells contain urushiol, a toxic, caustic oil the same chemical found in poison ivy.
Therefore, both the lexical meaning of "मांस" and the contextual reference to roasting remain fully consistent with a plant-based interpretation, and do not imply the consumption of animal flesh.

Still, some argue that since kshatriyas are permitted to eat meat, it must mean Shri Ram also did. This reasoning is flawed. Just because something is allowed for kshatriyas does not mean every kshatriya necessarily practiced it. For example, according to the Manusmriti (3.13), kshatriyas are permitted to marry more than one woman, yet Shri Ram chose to marry only Sita. This clearly shows that what is permitted does not automatically reflect what Shri Ram personally practiced.

We can clearly see from the Manusmriti that kshatriyas are permitted to marry up to three women.
3.13

शूद्रा-एव भार्या शूद्रस्य सा च स्वा च विशः स्मृते। ते च स्वा च-एव राज्ञश् च ताश् च स्वा च-अग्र-जन्मनः॥

३-१३

3.13. It is declared that a Sudra woman alone (can be) the wife of a Sudra, she and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Vaisya, those two and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Kshatriya, those three and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Brahmana.

Thus, upon careful examination of the Valmiki Ramayana, it becomes evident that the controversial verses, when understood in their proper context, do not explicitly refer to the consumption of meat. Misinterpretations and mistranslations have, at times, been used to create controversy and to support preconceived narratives.

One point, however, remains clear: Shree Ram is described as engaging in hunting. This raises an important question whether hunting is sanctioned within the Vedic framework. To address this, it becomes necessary to examine the position of the Vedas on hunting and related practices.

Furthermore, it is equally important to consider whether Shree Ram possessed knowledge of the Vedas, and if so, how his actions align with their teachings. As a central figure portrayed as adhering to dharma, his conduct is often interpreted within the broader context of Vedic principles.

In addition, an examination of what Shree Ram himself states regarding hunting provides further clarity. By analyzing these aspects the Vedic standpoint, his knowledge of scripture, and his own expressed views a more accurate understanding of the issue can be established.

Hinduism's primary foundational texts are the Vedas. Therefore, to understand the position on hunting, it is appropriate to examine what the Vedas state on the subject.

Yajurveda chapter 13 mantra 47

पदार्थान्वयभाषाः -हे (अग्ने) अग्नि के समान मनुष्य के जन्म को प्राप्त हुए (मेधाय) सुख की प्राप्ति के लिये (चीयमानः) बढ़े हुए (सहस्राक्षः) हजारह प्रकार की दृष्टिवाले राजन्! तू (इमम्) इस (द्विपादम्) दो पगवाले मनुष्यादि और (मेधम्) पवित्रकारक फलप्रद (मयुम्) जंगली (पशुम्) गवादि पशु जीव को (मा) मत (हिंसीः) मारा कर, उस (पशुम्) पशु की (जुषस्व) सेवा कर, (तेन) उस पशु से (चिन्वानः) बढ़ता हुआ तू (तन्वः) शरीर में (निषीद) निरन्तर स्थिर हो, यह (ते) तेरे से (शुक्) शोक (मयुम्) शस्यादिनाशक जंगली पशु को (ऋच्छतु) प्राप्त होवे (ते) तेरे (यम्) जिस शत्रु से हम लोग (द्विष्मः) द्वेष करें, (तम्) उसको (शुक्) शोक (ऋच्छतु) प्राप्त होवे ॥ ४७ ॥

भावार्थभाषाः -कोई भी मनुष्य सब के उपकार करनेहारे पशुओं को कभी न मारे, किन्तु इनकी अच्छे प्रकार रक्षा कर और इन से उपकार ले के सब मनुष्यों को आनन्द देवे। जिन जंगली पशुओं से ग्राम के पशु, खेती और मनुष्यों की हानि हो, उनको राजपुरुष मारें और बन्धन करें ॥४७ ॥

Interpretative Meaning (Bhāvārtha Vyākhyā):

No human being should kill animals that are beneficial to society. Instead, they should be protected and cared for so that they continue to serve and support human life. However, animals that cause harm to agriculture, livestock, or human beings particularly dangerous wild animals may be controlled or eliminated by the ruler (king) for the greater good and safety of society.

To further examine this, it is appropriate to refer to the Valmiki Ramayana and analyze whether Shri Ram is described as having knowledge of the Vedas.

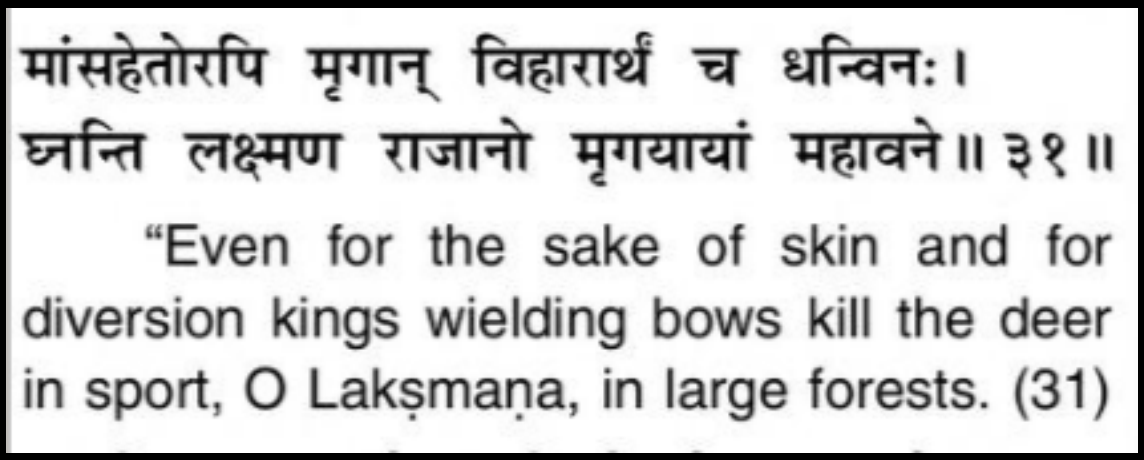
Balakanda chapter 1 verse 14

रक्षिता स्वस्य धर्मस्य स्वजनस्य च रक्षिता।
वेदवेदाङ्गतत्त्वज्ञो धनुर्वेदे च निष्ठितः॥ १४॥

"He is a vindicator of his own virtue and the protector of his own people. He knows the truth of the Vedas and the six sciences (grammar etc.) auxiliary to them and is a past master in archery. (14)

Now, to further examine the subject, it is appropriate to turn to the Valmiki Ramayana and analyze what it states regarding hunting.

Aranyakanda chapter 43 verse 31



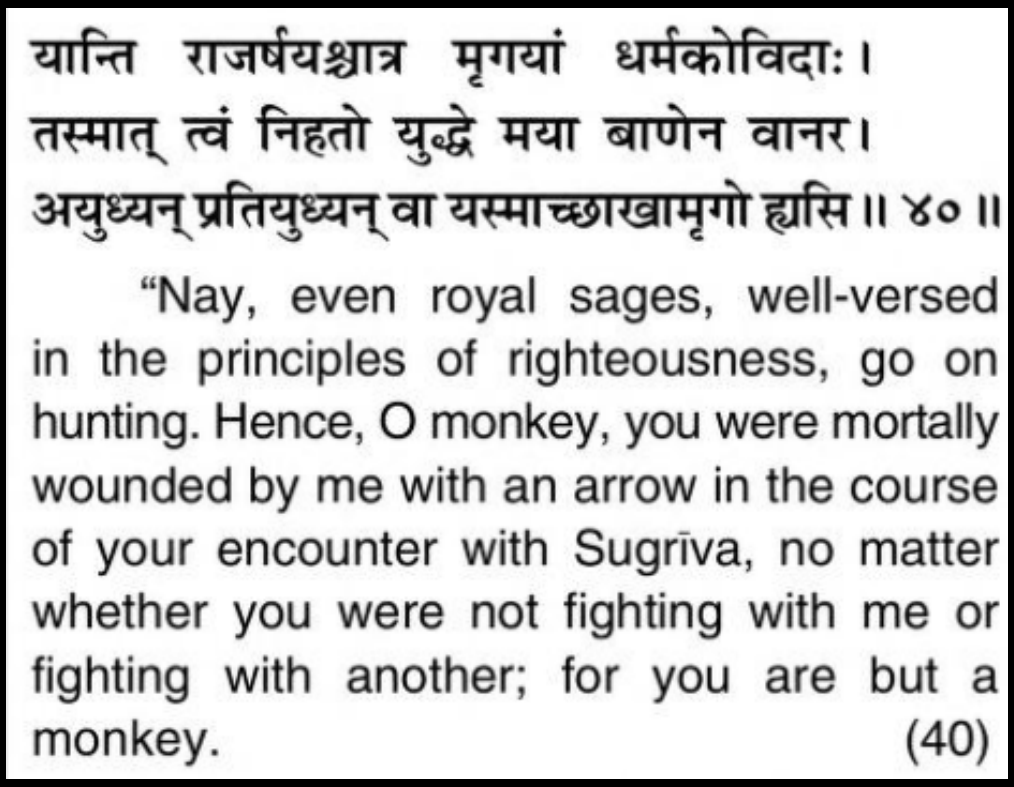
मांसहेतोरपि मृगान् विहारार्थं च धन्विनः।
घ्नन्ति लक्ष्मण राजानो मृगयायां महावने॥ ३१॥

"Even for the sake of skin and for diversion kings wielding bows kill the deer in sport, O Lakṣmaṇa, in large forests. (31)

As can be clearly observed in the Valmiki Ramayana, it is indicated that kings were permitted to hunt animals, including for obtaining skins, and that hunting was also practiced as a form of sport.

Aanother reference

Kiskindhakanda chapter 18 verse 40



यान्ति राजर्षयश्चात्र मृगयां धर्मकोविदाः।
तस्मात् त्वं निहतो युद्धे मया बाणेन वानर।
अयुध्यन् प्रतियुध्यन् वा यस्माच्छाखामृगो ह्यसि॥ ४०॥

"Nay, even royal sages, well-versed in the principles of righteousness, go on hunting. Hence, O monkey, you were mortally wounded by me with an arrow in the course of your encounter with Sugrīva, no matter whether you were not fighting with me or fighting with another; for you are but a monkey. (40)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram states, while addressing Bali, that even royal sages who are well versed in righteousness engage in hunting.

Thus, it can be inferred that the Vedas permit hunting in certain contexts, and in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram who is described as knowledgeable in the Vedas acknowledges that hunting is practiced by kings and royal sages.

Having established from the Valmiki Ramayana that Shri Ram engaged in hunting and having addressed the controversial interpretations regarding meat consumption, the next step is to examine what he is actually described as eating during his time in the forest.
In this regard, various references from the text record conversations between Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman that describe the types of food they intended to consume while living in the forest.

Now, let us examine the first reference from the Valmiki Ramayana, where Shri Ram vows to subsist only on fruits while living in the forest.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 20 verse 29

चतुर्दश हि वर्षाणि वत्स्यामि विजने वने।
कन्दमूलफलैर्जीवन् हित्वा मुनिवदामिषम्॥ २९॥

"Indeed for fourteen years I shall actually live in a lonely forest, subsisting like ascetics on bulbs, roots and fruits and giving up royal fare.[2] (29)

Some individuals cite this verse from the Valmiki Ramayana to argue that the term "amisham" refers specifically to meat, and therefore conclude that Shri Ram consumed meat but abstained only during his forest life. However, this interpretation is linguistically incomplete.
The term "amisham" does not exclusively mean meat; it can also denote objects of enjoyment, sensory indulgence, or rich and desirable foods in a broader sense. In this context, the passage conveys that Shri Ram renounced the luxuries of royal life including rich, pleasurable foods and chose to live with the simplicity and restraint of a forest dwelling ascetic (muni).
This understanding is further supported by standard translations that render the phrase as "royal fare," which refers to rich or luxurious food associated with palace life, rather than specifically indicating meat.

Here, as evidenced by the Vaman Shivram Apte Sabdkosh, the term "amisha" is also defined as an object of enjoyment or desire, and is not limited solely to the meaning of meat.

आमिषं 1 Flesh; उपानयत् पिंडमिवामिषस्य R. 2. 59. 2 (Hence fig.) A prey, victim, object of enjoyment; (पर्व्यं) क्षात्त्वेषणदक्षाणां द्विषामामिषतां ययौ R. 12. 11 fell a prey &c.; Dk. 164. 3 Food, bait. 4 A bribe. 5 Desire, lust. 6 Enjoyment; pleasing or lovely object.

So, even if for a moment we accept that “amisham” means meat in this context, it still does not change the overall meaning of the verse in the Valmiki Ramayana; the central message remains the same.
He is stating that he will subsist on roots and fruits and will not consume meat, but does that automatically mean he used to eat meat? No there is no supporting evidence for that conclusion. Moreover, this statement is specifically made for the period of vanavas, and the controversial verses also belong to this same period which i have already debunked. When he clearly says he will live on roots and fruits, the absence of any mention of meat raises the question: if it were part of his diet, why is it not stated?

Additionally, if someone says, “I will do A and not do B,” does that automatically imply they previously did B? That line of reasoning is not logically sound.

And the word used here is “subsist,” which means living on the bare minimum. Do we consider consuming large animals like deer as living on the bare minimum, or does living on whatever fruits and roots are available better fit that meaning? Clearly, the latter aligns more accurately with the idea of subsist.

In the verse, the word “jīvana” denotes subsistence, which means living on the bare minimum.

जीवन	n.	jIvana	**subsist**ence

This reference is taken from the Learn Sanskrit Dictionary; clicking on the word “REFERENCE” below will take you to the source.

REFERENCE

Again, just one verse later in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram reiterates that he will live on roots and fruits.

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram also states that for fourteen years he will dwell in the forest living on fruits.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 20 verse 31

स षट् चाष्टौ च वर्षाणि वत्स्यामि विजने वने।
आसेवमानो वन्यानि फलमूलैश्च वर्तयन्॥ ३१॥

"As such I shall live in a lonely forest for six years and eight, wearing the barks of wild trees and living on fruits and roots." (31)

If one accepts Shri Ram as a dharmatma and a truthful person, then it follows that he did not consume meat.

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, King Dasharath expresses concern, questioning how his son will be able to live in the forest subsisting only on fruits and roots.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 24 verse 3

यस्य भृत्याश्च दासाश्च मृष्टान्यन्नानि भुञ्जते।
कथं स भोक्ष्यते रामो वने मूलफलान्ययम्॥ ३॥

"How shall this boy, the same Rāma whose very dependants and servants partake of dainty dishes, eat roots and fruits in the forest? (3)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Sita expresses that she will gladly partake of seasonal fruits while living in the forest.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 30 verse 16

न मातुर्न पितुस्तत्र स्मरिष्यामि न वेश्मनः।
आर्तवान्युपभुञ्जाना पुष्पाणि च फलानि च॥ १६॥

"Enjoying there seasonal flowers and fruits too I shall neither remember my mother nor father nor home. (16)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Bharadwaj Muni advises Shri Ram to go to Chitrakoot, describing it as a place abundant with honey, roots, and fruits.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 54 verse 38

रात्र्यां तु तस्यां व्युष्टायां भरद्वाजोऽब्रवीदिदम्।
मधुमूलफलोपेतं चित्रकूटं व्रजेति ह॥ ३८॥

That night having come to an end, Bharadwāja, when requested as above, replied for his part, they say, as follows: "Proceed gladly to Citrakūṭa, rich in honey, roots and fruits. (38)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, upon observing trees such as the nut and bel laden with fruits, Shri Ram remarks that they will be able to sustain themselves by living on these.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 56 verse 7

पश्य भल्लातकान् बिल्वान् नरैरनुपसेवितान्।
फलपुष्पैरवनतान् नूनं शक्ष्याम जीवितुम्॥ ७॥

"Look at the markingnut and Bel trees, not made use of by men (being out of their reach) and bent low under the weight of their fruit and blossoms. We shall surely be able to live through. (7)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram states that since the place is abundant with roots and fruits, they will be able to sustain themselves there with ease.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 56 verse 13,14

तं तु पर्वतमासाद्य नानापक्षिगणायुतम्।
बहुमूलफलं रम्यं सम्पन्नसरसोदकम्॥ १३॥
मनोज्ञोऽयं गिरिः सौम्य नानाद्रुमलतायुतः।
बहुमूलफलो रम्यः स्वाजीवः प्रतिभाति मे॥ १४॥

Reaching that lovely mountain, abounding in flocks of birds of many kinds and having a rich stock of roots and fruits and having sweet water in abundance, Śrī Rāma for his part said to Lakṣmaṇa, "Soul-captivating is this delightful mountain adorned with many trees and creepers and abounds in roots and fruits. To me it appears to be a place where sustenance could be found with ease, O gentle brother ! (13-14)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, while offering the piṇḍa for his father, Shri Ram presents it as consisting of fruits and respectfully says, "Please partake of this, which is our only food," by which he indicates that they subsist solely on fruits.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 103 verse 29,30

ऐङ्गुदं बदरैर्मिश्रं पिण्याकं दर्भसंस्तरे।
न्यस्य रामः सुदुःखार्तो रुदन् वचनमब्रवीत्॥ २९॥

Serving the crushed pulp of Iṅgudī fruit mixed with the pulp of plums on a mat of Kuśa grass, Śrī Rāma, who was sore stricken with agony, spoke weeping as follows : (29)

इदं भुङ्क्ष्व महाराज प्रीतो यदशना वयम्।
यदन्नः पुरुषो भवति तदन्नास्तस्य देवताः॥ ३०॥

"Delightfully partake of this, which is our only food, O great monarch! Deties partake of the same food which a man worshipping them eats." (30)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Hanuman informs Sita that Shri Ram does not consume meat and instead subsists on fruits and boiled rice.
Sundarakanda chapter 36 verse 41

न मांसं राघवो भुङ्क्ते न चैव मधु सेवते।
वन्यं सुविहितं नित्यं भक्तमश्नाति पञ्चमम्॥ ४१॥

"Śrī Rāma, a scion of Raghu, does not take meat nor honey. He partakes everyday of wild fruits and boiled (wild) rice, fully sanctioned for an ascetic, in the evening (the fifth* period of the day). (41)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, it is stated that no one in Ayodhya partakes of impure or unholy food.
Balakanda chapter 6 verse 11

नामृष्टभोजी नादाता नाप्यनङ्गदनिष्कधृक् ।
नाहस्ताभरणो वापि दृश्यते नाप्यनात्मवान्॥ ११॥

Nobody was seen in Ayodhyā taking unholy food, not giving alms and not exercising control over his mind. No one was found there who had no gold bangles, a gold ornament for the neck and armlets on his person. (11)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Sita states that she will live on roots and fruits

Ayodhyakanda chapter 27.16

फलमूलाशना नित्यं भविष्यामि न संशयः।
न ते दुःखं करिष्यामि निवसन्ती त्वया सदा॥ १६॥

"I shall without doubt live on fruits and roots alone from day to day and shall not cause any annoyance to you while living with you. (16)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram tells Sita that they will satisfy their hunger with fruits fallen from the trees.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 28 verse 12

अहोरात्रं च संतोषः कर्तव्यो नियतात्मना।
फलैर्वृक्षावपतितैः सीते दुःखमतो वनम्॥ १२॥

"By day and by night hunger has to be appeased with one's mind fully controlled by means of fruits fallen of themselves from trees, O Sītā! Hence a forest is full of privations. (12)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Sita tells Shri Ram that whatever fruits, roots, or leaves he provides will taste like nectar to her.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 30 verse 15

पत्रं मूलं फलं यत्तु अल्पं वा यदि वा बहु।
दास्यसे स्वयमाहृत्य तन्मेऽमृतरसोपमम्॥ १५॥

"Anything you will give me in the shape of leaves, roots or fruits, bringing it yourself in a small or large quantity will taste like nectar to me. (15)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Lakshman tells Shri Ram that he will bring roots and fruits for him every day.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 31 verse 26

आहरिष्यामि ते नित्यं मूलानि च फलानि च।
वन्यानि च तथान्यानि स्वाहार्हाणि तपस्विनाम्॥ २६॥

"Nay, I shall procure for you from day to day wild roots and fruits and other products as well fit for being consigned as oblation into the sacred fire. (26)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, one of the important verses records Shri Ram telling his father, Dasharath, that he will live in the forest subsisting on fruits and roots.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 34 verse 59

फलानि मूलानि च भक्षयन् वने
गिरींश्च पश्यन् सरितः सरांसि च।
वनं प्रविश्यैव विचित्रपादपं
सुखी भविष्यामि तवास्तु निर्वृतिः॥ ५९॥

"Living in the forest on fruits and roots and viewing the mountains, rivers and lakes, I shall be happy the moment I enter the forest consisting of various trees. Let peace come to you on this account." (59)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram tells Bharadwaj Rishi that his father instructed them to dwell in the forest, living solely on roots and fruits.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 54 verse 16

पित्रा नियुक्ता भगवन् प्रवेक्ष्यामस्तपोवनम्।
धर्ममेवाचरिष्यामस्तत्र मूलफलाशनाः ॥ १६ ॥

"Ordered by our father, O venerable sage, we shall retire to a forest suited for austerities and shall practise virtue alone there, living on roots and fruits only." (16)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram tells Bharat that he will live in the forest subsisting on fruits and roots, in accordance with his father's command.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 109 verse 26,27

वनवासं वसन्नेव शुचिर्नियतभोजनः।
मूलपुष्पफलैः पुण्यैः पितॄन् देवांश्च तर्पयन्॥ २६ ॥
संतुष्टपञ्चवर्गोऽहं लोकयात्रां प्रवाहये।
अकुहः श्रद्दधानः सन् कार्याकार्यविचक्षणः ॥ २७ ॥

"Having controlled my diet and propitiating gods as well as manes by means of sacred roots, flowers and fruits while continuing to reside in the forest only and remaining pure of body and mind, with all the five senses fully sated, nay, free from all viles, devout and fully cognizant of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, I propose to discharge my worldly obligations in the form of carrying out the behest of my father. (26-27)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram addresses the rakshasas, questioning why they seek to harm them when they live only on roots and fruits.
Aranyakanda chapter 20 verse 8

फलमूलाशनौ दान्तौ तापसौ ब्रह्मचारिणौ।
वसन्तौ दण्डकारण्ये किमर्थमुपहिंसथ॥ ८॥

"Why do you seek to injure us, who subsist on fruits and roots, are self-disciplined, practise austerities and continence and are living in the Daṇḍaka forest? (8)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shurpanakha informs Ravan that Shri Ram and Lakshman subsist only on fruits and roots, indicating that even the rakshasas were aware of their simple forest diet.Despite clear references in the Valmiki Ramayana, some individuals ignore or dismiss these verses to support their own interpretations.
Aranyakanda chapter 19 verse 14,15

तरुणौ रूपसम्पन्नौ सुकुमारौ महाबलौ।
पुण्डरीकविशालाक्षौ चीरकृष्णाजिनाम्बरौ॥ १४॥
फलमूलाशनौ दान्तौ तापसौ ब्रह्मचारिणौ।
पुत्रौ दशरथस्यास्तां भ्रातरौ रामलक्ष्मणौ॥ १५॥

"Young and richly endowed with comeliness, tender yet possessed of extraordinary might, having large lotus-like eyes and clad in the bark of trees and black antelope skin, living on fruits and roots, self-controlled, practising austerities and continence, there are two brothers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, sons of Daśaratha. (14-15)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram tells Guha that he has taken a vow to subsist only on roots and fruits.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 50 verse 44

कुशचीराजिनधरं फलमूलाशनं च माम्।
विद्धि प्रणिहितं धर्मे तापसं वनगोचरम्॥ ४४॥

"Know me as under a vow to wear (a zone of) Kuśa grass, the bark of trees and deerskin and to subsist on fruits and roots alone, to practise austerities and dwell in the forest, remaining devoted to piety. (44)

It is also noted in the Mahabharata that various kings who abstained from meat are mentioned, and Shri Ram's name is included among them.
Anushasana parva chapter 115 verse 63 to 67

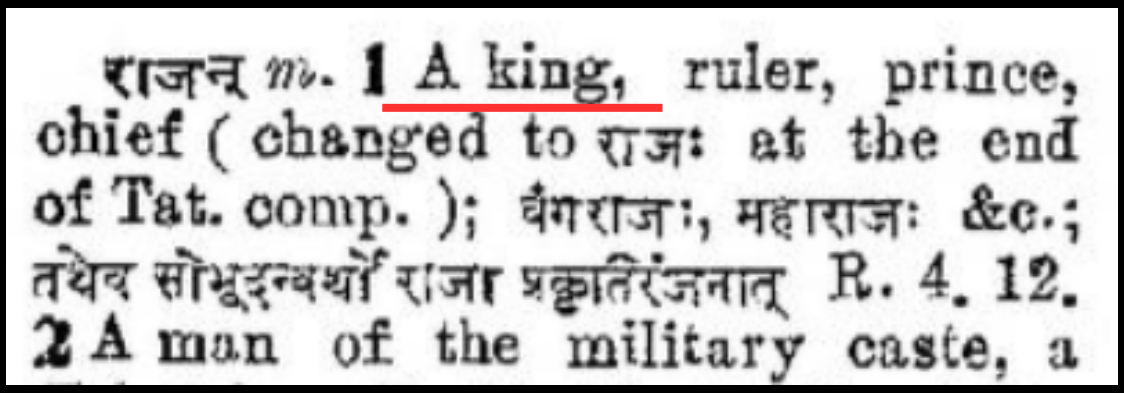
रैवते रन्तिदेवेन वसुना सृञ्जयेन च ।। ६३ ।।
एतैश्चान्यैश्च राजेन्द्र कृपेण भरतेन च ।
दुष्यन्तेन करूषेण रामालर्कनरैस्तथा ।। ६४ ।।
विरूपाश्वेन निमिना जनकेन च धीमता ।
ऐलेन पृथुना चैव वीरसेनेन चैव ह ।। ६५ ।।
इक्ष्वाकुणा शम्भुना च श्वेतेन सगरेण च ।
अजेन धुन्धुना चैव तथैव च सुबाहुना ।। ६६ ।।
हर्यश्वेन च राजेन्द्र क्षुपेण भरतेन च ।
एतैश्चान्यैश्च राजेन्द्र पुरा मांसं न भक्षितम् ।। ६७ ।।

राजेन्द्र! श्येनचित्र, सोमक, वृक, रैवत, रन्तिदेव, वसु, सृंजय, अन्यान्य नरेश, कृप, भरत, दुष्यन्त, करूष, राम, अलर्क, नर, विरूपाश्व, निमि, बुद्धिमान् जनक, पुरूरवा, पृथु, वीरसेन, इक्ष्वाकु, शम्भु, श्वेतसागर, अज, धुन्धु, सुबाहु, हर्यश्व, क्षुप, भरत—इन सबने तथा अन्यान्य राजाओंने भी कभी मांस नहीं खाया था ।।

This entire discussion, particularly in Chapters 115 and 116 of the Mahabharata, focuses on the negative consequences of meat and wine consumption. Some argue that these passages are not referring to kings, or that the "Ram" mentioned is not Shri Ram. However, when examining the surrounding verses, it becomes clear that the context is indeed about kings specifically those who undertook vows such as abstaining from eating meat for a month, and among them, those who never consumed meat at all.

It is clearly indicated that the passage is referring to kings, with the word “rājendra” used three times. In the final shloka, “rājendra” appears twice once as a form of address (sambodhana) and once in reference to kings. The term “rājendra” is derived from rājan and indra.

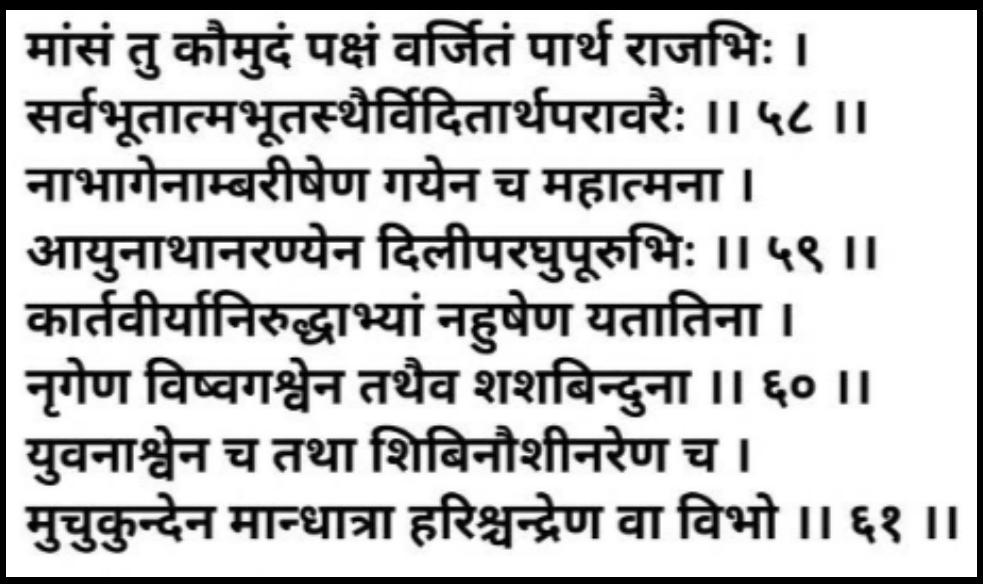
Regarding the reference to “Ram,” since the passage is referring to a period before the Mahabharata, Parashuram was not a king, and Balaram belongs to the Mahabharata period. Therefore, the only king named Ram fitting this context is Shri Ram, which supports the identification of this Ram as Shri Ram.



राजन् m. 1 A king, ruler, prince, chief (changed to राजः at the end of Tat. comp.); वंगराजः, महाराजः &c.; तथेव सोभूदन्वर्थो राजा प्रकृतिरंजनात् R. 4. 12. 2 A man of the military caste, a

Here, from the Vaman Shivram Apte Sabdkosh, it can be seen that “rājan” means king.

From the same chapter in the Mahabharata, verses 58 to 61 clearly indicate that the discussion is referring to kings those who abstained from eating meat for a month, and those who never consumed meat at all.



मांसं तु कौमुदं पक्षं वर्जितं पार्थ राजभिः ।
सर्वभूतात्मभूतस्थैर्विदितार्थपरावरैः ।। ५८ ।।
नाभागेनाम्बरीषेण गयेन च महात्मना ।
आयुनाथानरण्येन दिलीपरघुपूरुभिः ।। ५९ ।।
कार्तवीर्यानिरुद्धाभ्यां नहुषेण यतातिना ।
नृगेण विष्वगश्वेन तथैव शशबिन्दुना ।। ६० ।।
युवनाश्वेन च तथा शिबिनौशीनरेण च ।
मुचुकुन्देन मान्धात्रा हरिश्चन्द्रेण वा विभो ।। ६१ ।।

कुन्तीनन्दन! जिन राजाओंने आश्विन मासके दोनों पक्ष अथवा एक पक्षमें मांस भक्षणका निषेध किया था, वे सम्पूर्ण भूतोंके आत्मरूप हो गये थे और उन्हें परावर तत्त्वका ज्ञान हो गया था। उनके नाम इस प्रकार हैं—नाभाग, अम्बरीष, महात्मा गय, आयु, अनरण्य, दिलीप, रघु, पूरु, कार्तवीर्य, अनिरुद्ध, नहुष, ययाति, नृग, विश्वगश्व, शशविन्दु, युवनाश्व, उशीनरपुत्र शिबि, मुचुकुन्द, मान्धाता अथवा हरिश्चन्द्र ।। ५८—६१ ।।

Below is the reference for the Mahabharata; click on “Mahabharata” below, and it will take you to the PDF.

MAHABHARATA

Thus, after examining numerous references from the Valmiki Ramayana, it becomes evident that Shri Ram’s forest diet is consistently described as consisting of fruits and roots. This is affirmed through his own vows, as well as statements by Sita, Lakshman, Bharadwaj Rishi, and even acknowledged by Shurpanakha.

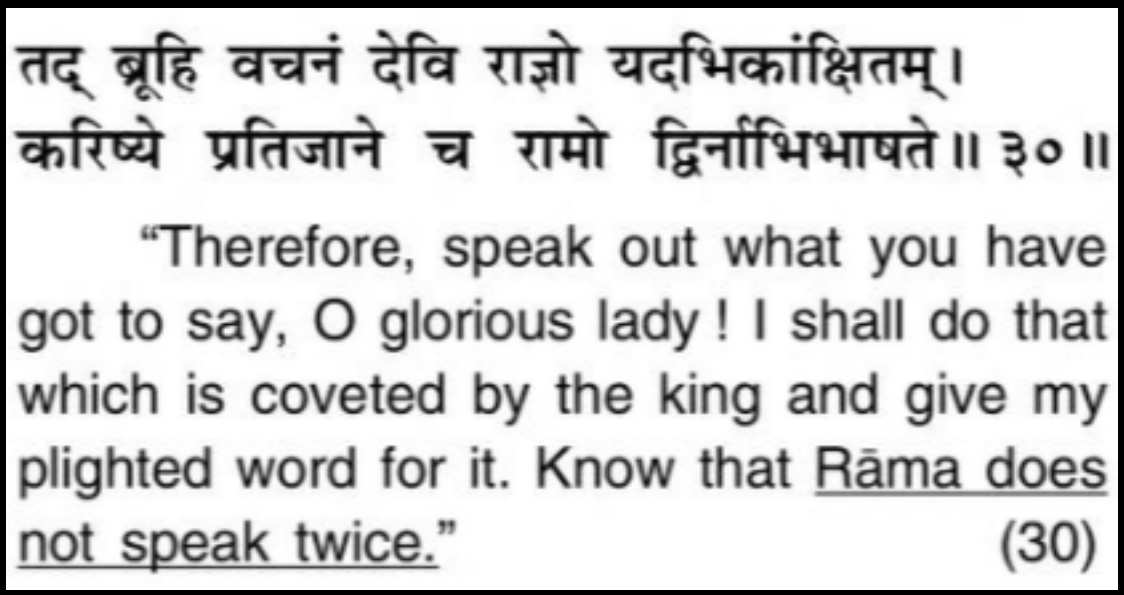
Despite this repeated and consistent testimony within the text, some individuals either due to lack of proper understanding or in an attempt to promote their own interpretations continue to assert that Shri Ram consumed meat, a claim that does not align with the broader textual evidence.

Thus, after seeing multiple instances in the Valmiki Ramayana where Shri Ram speaks about living on fruits during his vanavas, an important question arises: could it be possible that Shri Ram was lying all the time? That is what some people are trying to suggest, knowingly or unknowingly.

If it is claimed that Shri Ram consumed meat despite these repeated statements, then it would imply that he was not truthful or that he broke his promises. Therefore, let us examine from the Valmiki Ramayana whether he is ever portrayed as a liar.

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram states that he does not speak twice, which means he never goes back on his word and always remains firm and truthful in what he says.

Ayodhyakanda chapter 18 verse 30



तद् ब्रूहि वचनं देवि राज्ञो यदभिकांक्षितम्।
करिष्ये प्रतिजाने च रामो द्विर्नाभिभाषते॥ ३०॥

"Therefore, speak out what you have got to say, O glorious lady ! I shall do that which is coveted by the king and give my plighted word for it. Know that Rāma does not speak twice." (30)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram states that truth is dear to him, and that even if he has to give up his life, he would do so, but he will not break his promise.

Aranyakanda chapter 10 verse 15 to 20

तेन शापं न मुञ्चामो भक्ष्यमाणाश्च राक्षसैः।
तदर्द्यमानान् रक्षोभिर्दण्डकारण्यवासिभिः॥ १५॥
रक्ष नस्त्वं सह भ्रात्रा त्वन्नाथा हि वयं वने।
मया चैतद्वचः श्रुत्वा कात्स्न्र्येन परिपालनम्॥ १६॥
ऋषीणां दण्डकारण्ये संश्रुतं जनकात्मजे।
संश्रुत्य च न शक्ष्यामि जीवमानः प्रतिश्रवम्॥ १७॥
मुनीनामन्यथा कर्तुं सत्यमिष्टं हि मे सदा।
अप्यहं जीवितं जह्यां त्वां वा सीते सलक्ष्मणाम्॥ १८॥
न तु प्रतिज्ञां संश्रुत्य ब्राह्मणेभ्यो विशेषतः।
तदवश्यं मया कार्यमृषीणां परिपालनम्॥ १९॥
अनुक्तेनापि वैदेहि प्रतिज्ञाय कथं पुनः।
मम स्नेहाच्च सौहार्दादिदमुक्तं त्वया वचः॥ २०॥

" 'Therefore, though being eaten up by the ogres, we do not pronounce a curse. Hence, alongwith your brother, you protect us, oppressed as we are by ogres dwelling in the Daṇḍaka forest. For, you alone are our master in the forest.' And having heard this speech, I promised complete protection to the sages living in the Daṇḍaka forest, O

daughter of Janaka ! And having made a promise, I dare not, as long as I am alive, falsify the word given to the sages. For, truth is always dear to me. I can even give up my life for you, together with Laksmaṇa, but not my plighted word, given especially to the Brāhmaṇas. Therefore, O Vaidehī, I am compelled to protect the sages, even if I had not given the word, much more so when a vow has been taken. You have uttered these words due to your love and goodwill for me. (15—20)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, it is clearly stated that Shri Ram always spoke the truth.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 18 verse 31

तमार्जवसमायुक्तमनार्या सत्यवादिनम्।
उवाच रामं कैकेयी वचनं भृशदारुणम्॥ ३१॥

To the said Śrī Rāma, who always spoke the truth and was richly adorned with guilelessness, the ignoble Kaikeyī addressed the following exceptionally cruel words : (31)

Thus, from these verses in the Valmiki Ramayana, it becomes evident that Shri Ram is consistently portrayed as one who never lies, always speaks the truth, does not speak twice (meaning he never goes back on his word), and remains firmly committed to his promises.

This repeated emphasis on truthfulness and unwavering commitment to vows reinforces his character as someone who upholds dharma in both word and action, without contradiction.

Now, moving to one of the most important aspects of this discussion: so far, we have seen from the Valmiki Ramayana that Shri Ram engaged in hunting, yet his diet during वनवास is consistently described as consisting of fruits and roots. This naturally raises an important question if he hunted animals, what did he do with the deer or other animals that were killed?
To address this, we will now examine relevant references from the text to understand the purpose of such actions and what is described as being done with the hunted animals.

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram tells Guha during his vanavas that he is under a vow to wear deerskin.
Ayodhyakanda chapter 50 verse 44

कुशचीराजिनधरं फलमूलाशनं च माम्।
विद्धि प्रणिहितं धर्मे तापसं वनगोचरम्॥ ४४॥

"Know me as under a vow to wear (a zone of) Kuśa grass, the bark of trees and deerskin and to subsist on fruits and roots alone, to practise austerities and dwell in the forest, remaining devoted to piety. (44)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shurpanakha, while describing Shri Ram and Lakshman to Ravan, mentions that they are wearing black antelope skin.
Aranyakanda chapter 19 verse 14,15

तरुणौ रूपसम्पन्नौ सुकुमारौ महाबलौ।
पुण्डरीकविशालाक्षौ चीरकृष्णाजिनाम्बरौ॥ १४॥
फलमूलाशनौ दान्तौ तापसौ ब्रह्मचारिणौ।
पुत्रौ दशरथस्यास्तां भ्रातरौ रामलक्ष्मणौ॥ १५॥

"Young and richly endowed with comeliness, tender yet possessed of extraordinary might, having large lotus-like eyes and clad in the bark of trees and black antelope skin, living on fruits and roots, self-controlled, practising austerities and continence, there are two brothers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, sons of Daśaratha. (14-15)

Here, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram says to Lakshmana that kings, for the sake of skin, hunt deer.
Aranyakanda chapter 43 verse 31

मांसहेतोरपि मृगान् विहारार्थं च धन्विनः।
घ्नन्ति लक्ष्मण राजानो मृगयायां महावने॥ ३१॥

"Even for the sake of skin and for diversion kings wielding bows kill the deer in sport, O Lakṣmaṇa, in large forests. (31)

And from the Vaman Shivram Apte Sabdkosh, we can clearly see that māṃsa also means skin.

मांसं Flesh, meat ; समांसो मधुपर्कः U. 4. (The word is thus fancifully derived in Ms. 5. 55.:—मां स भक्षयिताऽमुत्र यस्य मांसमिहाद्म्यहम् । एतन्मांसस्य मांसत्वं प्रवदन्ति मनीषिणः ॥). **2** The flesh of fish. **2** The fleshy part of a fruit. **-सः 1** A worm. **2** N. of a mixed tribe, selling meat. **-Comp. -अद्, -अद, -आदिन्, -भक्षक** *a.* flesh-eating, carnivorous (as an animal) ; Bk. 16. 28, Ms 5 15. **-अर्गलः-लं** a piece of flesh hanging down from the mouth. **-अशनं** flesh-eating. **आहारः** animal food. **-उपजीविन्** *m.* a dealer in flesh. **-ओदनः 1** meal of flesh. **2** rice boiled with flesh. **-कारि** *n.* blood. **-ग्रंथिः** a gland. **-जं, तेजस्** *n.* fat. **-द्राविन्** *m.* a kind of sorrel. **-निर्यासः** the hair of the body. **-पिंडकः-कं 1** a basket of flesh **2** a large quantity of flesh. **-पित्तं** a bone. **-पेशी 1** a muscle. **2** a piece of flesh. **3** an epithet of the fœtus from the 8th to the 14th day. **-भेत्तृ,-भेदिन्** *a.* cutting the flesh. **-योनिः** a creature of flesh and blood. **-विक्रयः** sale of meat. **-सारः, -स्नेहः** fat. **-हासा** skin.

Thus, from these verses in the Valmiki Ramayana, it can be concluded that Shri Ram was hunting deer for their skins rather than for their meat.

CONCLUSION

Thus, so far, we have examined the controversial verses from the Valmiki Ramayana and analyzed them in detail. We have also seen that Shri Ram's engagement in hunting is presented as justified within the context, while multiple verses consistently describe him as subsisting on fruits during his vanavas.
Additionally, the text portrays Shri Ram as one who never lies and never breaks his promises, repeatedly affirming his commitment to truth and his stated way of life. Therefore, when he says multiple times that he lived on fruits, it is to be understood as truthful and not otherwise.
Finally, we have also examined the purpose behind hunting, concluding from these references that the deer were hunted for their skins rather than for meat.

Additionally, even with this much compelling evidence and numerous verses providing clear context from the Valmiki Ramayana, some continue to rely on selective readings of controversial passages to argue that Shri Ram consumed meat. Such interpretations are often used to support preconceived views or to justify personal choices.
In doing so, they disregard the broader and repeated testimony of the text; and even if, hypothetically, Shri Ram himself were to clarify otherwise, their response would likely remain focused on isolated verses rather than the full context.

In attempting to argue this, whether knowingly or unknowingly, they are effectively suggesting that Shri Ram was a liar, which is entirely inconsistent with the portrayal found in the Valmiki Ramayana. A proper reading of the text and an understanding of Shri Ram's character revered as Maryada Purushottam clearly show that such a claim stands in direct contradiction to his established nature.

For me personally, it does not change anything whether he ate meat or not. We do not revere Shri Ram for what he eats; we do so because he is an incarnation of Vishnu and is regarded as Maryada Purushottam. However, if he were to be portrayed as someone who lies, then he would no longer be Maryada Purushottam for me. And if these people choose to interpret him in that way, then who am I to judge them?
I am not here to push any agenda onto anyone; I am simply presenting my research. You are intelligent enough to discern between right and wrong do your own research and arrive at your own conclusion.

Jai Shri Ram.

SOURCES

All sources used in this project are listed below. The Sabdokosh referenced is by Vaman Shivram Apte. The Valmiki Ramayana has been used as published by Gita Press. The Vedas have also been referenced from वेद.com

The links to all sources are provided below. Clicking on the name of each source will direct you to its respective page.

Sabdkosh

Valmiki Ramayana part 1

Valmiki Ramayana part 2

Ved